

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2003

First Prize: Monica Thomas, Washington Middle School

“The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers.” This quote is taken from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Strength to Love” of 1963. Dr. King’s is most famous for his “I Have a Dream” speech, which he addressed at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963 for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In his speech, King speaks of his dreams for an end to racism, and a celebration of diversity.

This quote is indeed true. The good neighbor does not judge others by their external appearances. “I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” A good neighbor would not see racial differences as “external accidents,” but rather accept, and even embrace them. Is it not true that with the lights off, we are all the same color?

Martin Luther King, Jr. fought against the segregation of his time, and if he were alive today, he would see the impact his words had on future generations. If he were alive today, he would see people of different races living and working together. He’d see his children teaching their children about what a man he truly was. Even people he never knew, who were influenced or affected by his words, would be teaching their children to celebrate diversity. He would be able to see that there are now festivals devoted to the diversity of the cultures of the world. The people who perform in these festivals come from the corners of the world to celebrate a common union. However, he would also see that there is still racism and prejudice today.

We have not yet made Dr. King’s dream come true, but are indeed very close to that goal. People around the United States still discriminate against others because of their race, gender, and sexual orientation. Though the first of these issues was the main focus of Martin’s life, all of these issues – racism, sexism, and homophobia – are still at large. Over time these discriminations, as racism to Dr. King, have had leaders and activists fight to put them to an end. It is uncertain whether or not these problems will ever truly be eliminated, but Martin Luther King, Jr. has definitely put in more than his fair share in trying to make that happen. Unfortunately, there are still those who are not as informed as others. Many parents have not done a sufficient job in teaching their children about Dr. King’s dream.

I myself have been personally affected by this man’s words, both positively and negatively. I have found that in our community, there exists a small hypocrisy concerning racism. It seems that much the African-American youth, for who Martin Luther King, Jr. so dearly fought for, have a slightly different interpretation of equal rights. Many Blacks speak out against racism towards their own race, while still discriminating against Whites, or even Blacks who have strong associations with Whites.

I use myself as an example of this hypocritical discrimination to make it understandable. I live in a mostly Caucasian neighborhood and many of my friends are White. According to others I listen to "White" music. However, I am an African-American girl, raised on the south side of Chicago. Most Blacks at my school find this "weird," as if the numbers just don't add up. I am often discriminated against, and had been for the past nine months known as "that one Black girl that goes out with that White boy." Prejudices such as these are absolutely unacceptable, and show that Dr. King's dream has not yet come true.

Had Martin Luther King, Jr. not died on April 4, 1968 and were alive today, he would have spent 35 more years focusing on his dream, educating the entire nation, if not the world. If he were here today to teach the difference between right and wrong, his dream would surely be fulfilled, and these prejudices would not exist. Had Dr. King not died on that day, this nation would have exceeded far more than it has (from the days of the Civil Rights Movement to day) without him.

Many organizations across the nation work to carry out Dr. King's dream. One of such organizations is AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps, which was created in 1993, is a nation-wide volunteer group that provides community service for our country. They do not specifically focus on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream, but it is a very important topic that they address regularly. Members of AmeriCorps are usually broken into subgroups, which are smaller organizations with more specific focuses.

One [of] these organizations, of which I have personally taken part in for the past three years, is City Year. City Year is a nation-wide volunteer group, which focuses on getting our youth involved in community service, and educates them of issues such as homelessness, violence, and racism. Last year, as a part of their Youth Heroes program, the group held a ceremony in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. During this ceremony, speeches, poetry, song, and dance were performed in honor of this man.

Organizations such as City Year are what this country needs to help educate our youth about racism and Dr. King's importance and influence. Because Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. died on April 4, 1968 and is not here today, it is important that we work to achieve that goal of carrying out his dream. It is natural for us as humans to have prejudices for some reason or other, so indeed before [we] can change the nation, we must change ourselves.

Bibliography

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